Brittany Gregory

LENS 1: *Dear Mr. Henshaw*

Children's Literature

2/12/13

*Reader-As-Writer*

One component that makes this text realistic is the development the main character goes through in his writing. The fact that Leigh makes the transition between loathing writing the letters to Mr. Henshaw and wanting to be an author is gradual but real. The author's writing itself also slowly improves, which is something to note. Texts that utilize writing through the prospective of someone who hasn't quite grasped the concept speak to students on their level. When reading this text, students will be immersed in the letter/diaries of a child. Leigh serves as a mentor for students who dislike writing, as well as students who enjoy it. For students who like writing, it keeps them optimistic about their own writings, solidifying the idea that anyone can be an author as long as they enjoy it. For students who do not like writing, *Dear Mr. Henshaw* shows a student who grows to appreciate it. This book would translate well in the classroom. The writing activities that could branch from this book are numerous.

One example would be a pen-pal letter exchange.

Assignment: Students will be paired up (with students from the same or differing classes) and exchange letters. With each progressing letter, students are to answer one of Mr. Henshaw's ten questions (listed below) as well as respond to the previous student's writing.

*Mr. Henshaw's Ten Questions*

1. Who are you?

2. What do you look like?

3. What if your family like?

4. Where do you live?

5. Do you have any pets?

6. Do you like school?

7. Who are your friends?

8. Who is your favorite teacher?

9. What bothers you?

10. What do you wish?

Purpose: This is an interactive way to practice writing. Students should learn to tell a story through their words – and not write one word responses!

*Example:*

Room 308 Bakeless

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February 12, 2013

Dear Pen-Pal,

I used to have a pen-pal when I was younger. I don't remember her much – expect for that fact that she was a girl. Honestly, I never really liked writing letters. I think there are faster ways of communicating. Or maybe I'm just lazy.

So let me start off with the first question: who am I? That's a really loaded question. Does it mean statistically, that I'm a twenty-two year old girl in college studying Early Childhood Education with an American father and a Filipino mother? Or does it mean what makes me tick inside? I'll answer that specifically.

Here are some facts: I'm constantly listening to music and sometimes wish I was in a movie so I could have background music for all my important life moments (just so I knew they were important). I'm doing an internship in a first grade classroom, and I love it more than I'd ever imagine. I could completely see myself doing that for the rest of my life, which is reassuring. My friends don't realize how important they are to me. Or my family. I'm shy, but that's only on the surface. I also want to travel: Paris, England, Australia.

This is feeling more like a diary entry than a letter, pen-pal. Maybe that was the point.

Write back soon!

Sincerely,

Brittany

*Reflection*

Though I wasn't trying to make the point of disliking then liking writing in that letter, I feel that maybe when an author is writing about themselves, it's easy. It's a good starting point. For Leigh, he was most honest in the letters. Eventually, when he went from writing to Mr. Henshaw to writing in his journal, it wasn't so much a chore anymore. The whole concept of the assignment would be to find a way to make writing enjoyable; in this case, it's context of what's being written. In our text *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, the authors Nodelman and Reimer talk about different ways a reader can connect to his/her text. There are different reasons to enjoy a story. The way a story is interpreted is based on the specific reader. This is the same for writing. “The pleasure of having one's emotions evoked,” “the pleasure of storytelling,” “the pleasure of escape,” are all ways of experiencing literature (p. 25).

“The pleasure of literature is the pleasure of conversation,” which helps tie into the writing aspect (p. 27). Writing is an expression. In *Dear Mr. Henshaw,* Leigh progressively gets better. Eventually, he gets to the point of his own writing becoming an expression as opposed to something unwanted. Hopefully, students would learn from the assignment the way Leigh did.